

# New Ecology director: ‘Let’s not let small problems get any bigger’

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Laura Watson was appointed by Gov. Jay Inslee as the new director of the Washington Department of Ecology in December.

She was most recently senior assistant attorney general in the Ecology Division of the Attorney General’s Office. As chief legal counsel to the Director of the Department of Ecology, she provided advice and representation to the agency’s administration.

She is also a former deputy solicitor general in the Attorney General’s Office.

She replaced Maia Bellon, who served as Ecology director for nearly seven years.

Watson began her new position Jan. 8.

For her first media interview as director, Watson spoke by telephone with the Capital Press on Jan. 29. The interview has been edited for length.

**Q. Tell us a little bit about your background. How did you become interested in Ecology?**

I think, like a lot of people, I became interested in environmental issues just very simply because I love the outdoors, I love natural areas, I love being outdoors, I love outdoor recreation.

We live in this amazingly beautiful state and the desire to protect the beauty of our state, I think is what motivates me.

When I was in college at the University of Pittsburgh — Pittsburgh is where I grew up — I got involved with social justice issues. Specifically, I worked with a women’s homeless population in Pittsburgh and continued my working with that population into my legal career.

When I think about it, it seems to me that environ-



**Laura Watson**

mental protection is really also a social justice issue. I think we all agree everybody deserves clean water,

clean air, access to natural areas. It feels to me like an extension of my commitment to those justice issues.

**Q. Do you have any agriculture in your background?**

I don’t. I’m not from an agricultural family. When I first moved to Thurston County, I had the pleasure of renting a farmhouse on an 80-acre farm. The farmer ran beef cattle on the property. It was wonderful. I feel lazy saying this, right? But I had the pleasure of being able to live on this beautiful, bucolic piece of property and not have to do any of the work of running a farm. But it was a really beautiful piece of property.

**Q. With the understanding that you’re still new in the position, are there any priorities you’ve identified?**

I’m really still in the process of getting out there and listening to folks — associations, businesses, Ecology staff, groups out there — as to what our main priorities should be.

Having said that, of course there are some things that jump out right away. A big one is climate change resiliency. Whether you’re talking about drought, flooding or wildfires, this is something we really need to address.

**Q. Will you continue Maia Bellon’s approach in reaching out to farmers and ranchers?**

Absolutely, I will plan to do that. It is a big priority of mine to do that. I

know Maia started the Agriculture and Water Quality advisory committee close to seven years ago, I think. I never had the pleasure of being able to attend one of those meetings, but now that I’m in this role, and into the future, I’ve heard it’s a very valuable committee, it’s a high priority of mine to continue that.

The way it’s been described to me is “a comfortable but structured conversation” on how we all can work together to protect our water. It’s really a way for us at Ecology to communicate about our work, why it’s important, and to be transparent with the people our work most directly affects.

I don’t want to limit communications with farmers and ranchers just to the committee. I would hope we can build durable relationships so we can have more durable solutions to problems. We all want a thriving economy, we all want a thriving environment, we want a thriving environment that supports the economy.

**Q. What can the agriculture community expect from Ecology under your leadership?**

I’m here to listen. I really do want to hear about some of the challenges that are facing the industry, as well as the priorities.

I met with the Washington Association of Wheat Growers just last week, and it was a great meeting. I really got to learn a lot about the industry.

Our agency’s mission is to protect the environment. The best way for us to do that is if we’re all working together.

**Q. What are you looking for from them?**

Primarily, let’s not let small problems get any bigger. So if there are issues that folks are hav-

ing with the Department of Ecology that are making it difficult for us to work together, I would hope people would feel comfortable reaching out directly to me and let’s try to work through those issues together.

I think a lot of the biggest problems arise when there are communication breakdowns. I would hope we’re not going to let that happen and we’re reaching out before those small problems get any bigger.

**Q. What would make your term as Ecology director a success in your eyes?**

I guess I’d say what probably most directors would say: I’d like to say I made measurable progress toward some of our biggest environmental challenges, whether it’s drought resiliency, climate change or water pollution. And as an agency, we’re focusing our energy and resources on addressing those problems.

We all know that these issues are big. They don’t get resolved overnight.

Really, at the end of my tenure, I’d want to be able to say to my daughter that, for example, the staff at Ecology did a fabulous job of making more cubic feet of water available, while also protecting flows for fish or keeping more toxic substances out of the environment. I’d be really proud if I were able to do that.

It’s not just what I would hope to accomplish, but how we get there. The only way we get to those great accomplishments is through our partnerships. The more brains we have at the table trying to come up with creative solutions, the more likely we are to hit on the right solution.



Beyond Burger

The plant-based Beyond Meat’s Beyond Burger is sold in grocery stores. The company has landed in court over investor allegations.

## Beyond Meat maker embroiled in litigation

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

An investor has filed a lawsuit against the Beyond Meat company, which makes plant-based imitation beef, pork and poultry products, for allegedly minimizing a dispute with a former food processor.

The complaint requests class action status, which would allow other stockholders to join in the litigation and seek compensation for a drop in Beyond Meat’s share prices.

According to the complaint, Beyond Meat didn’t fully disclose its legal vulnerabilities in an earlier lawsuit filed by Don Lee Farms, a former manufacturing partner that accused the company of stealing trade secrets.

Don Lee Farms also made other allegations, such as claiming that Beyond Meat had supplied its food processing facility with ingredients contaminated with plastic, cardboard, a metal nozzle and an unidentified white powder.

The former processor also claimed that Beyond Meat had falsified a food safety audit and that it breached a contract by shifting its business to another manufacturer.

In a cross-complaint,

Beyond Meat and its new manufacturing partner denied these claims and accused Don Lee Farms of violating its contract by contaminating products with “salmonella and other foreign objects.”

While the legal conflict began about two years before Beyond Meat began selling its shares to the public in 2019, the new stockholders’ lawsuit alleges the food company made “generic disclaimers” about the litigation that didn’t fully reveal its “actual known risks.”

According to the complaint, the truth began to emerge after Don Lee Farms issued a press release in late January that touted a couple recent preliminary legal rulings that worked in the former manufacturing partner’s favor.

The press release caused Beyond Meat’s “artificially inflated” stock price to tumble \$4.63, or 3.71%, to \$120.12 by the next day, the complaint said. The company’s stock has recently traded below \$120 per share.

The investor lawsuit argues that Beyond Meat has made materially false and misleading statements in violation of federal securities laws and seeks compensation for damages in an unspecified amount.

## Clear Springs Foods under new ownership

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

Riverence Holdings LLC has acquired Clear Springs Foods Inc., a Buhl, Idaho-based rainbow trout company that has operated fish farms in the area since 1966.

Riverence Holdings also owns Riverence Brood in Washington and Riverence Farms in Idaho. With the acquisition, Riverence Holdings has become the largest land-based producer of trout in the Americas, the company said in a press release announcing the acquisition.

Riverence and Clear Springs were not immediately available for comment on Monday afternoon.

The Magic Valley will continue to be the base of operations for both Riverence and Clear Springs, with the intent to maintain the existing brands, team members and the markets they serve. Together, the companies employ over 450 people, the company said.


“We believe in aquaculture and sustainable, land-based production of seafood,” Rob Young, CEO of Riverence, said in the press release.

“We have found a community of like-minded people in the Magic Valley. With this investment, we are strengthening our commitment to them and to setting tables across the country with premium, responsibly raised fish,” he said.

“We’re starting to reimagine the potential of the U.S. trout industry,” Jeff Jermunson, CEO of Clear Springs Foods, said.

“We are honored to begin the next chapter of our company’s long history as part of the Riverence family,” he said.

Together with Clear Springs Foods, Riverence gains “egg to plate” command of the supply chain, from its brood stock to delivery to distributors.




**JOHN DEERE**

JohnDeere.com/6M  
JohnDeere.ca/6M

**We didn’t just design the  
6M Series Tractors with you in mind.  
We designed them with you by our side.**

Before we even hit the drawing board, we talked with farmers, fleet owners and more to learn what they need in a mid-size utility tractor.

**Visit your John Deere dealer** to experience the tractor you designed—with more visibility, better maneuverability and more options to fit your needs.



**The 6M.**  
Reimagined by you. For you.

**John Deere Dealers**  
See one of these dealers for a demonstration

**Belcorp Ag, LLC**  
Modesto, CA


**Campbell Tractor & Implement**  
Fruitland, ID  
Homedale, ID  
Nampa, ID  
Wendell, ID

**Papé Machinery, Inc.**  
Four Lakes, WA  
Madras, OR  
Merrill, OR  
Moscow, ID  
Ponderay, ID  
Tangent, OR  
Tekoa, WA  
Walla Walla, WA

**Stotz Equipment**  
American Falls, ID

**Tri-County Equipment**  
Enterprise, OR  
La Grande, OR

**Washington Tractor, Inc.**  
Chehalis, WA  
Ellensburg, WA  
Lynden, WA  
Quincy, WA



**JOHN DEERE**

5171818-1